

## **Conference in 2009 was held in Blackrock, Dublin from Thursday 4th - Sunday 7th June in the Michael Smurfit Business School.**

Thanks to the Dublin District who worked hard to ensure that everything ran smoothly and also to all who provided hospitality.

### **THE REV DONALD P. KER BA, BD, MTh, President 2009**

The new President of the Methodist Church in Ireland is the Rev. Donald P. Ker BA, BD, MTh. Designated at the Annual Conference of 2008 held in Londonderry, Mr. Ker is currently the Church's General Secretary.

Donald is the youngest of three sons born to the Rev. Ernest and Mrs. Mary Ker. He received his primary and secondary education at Methodist College Belfast. His university career began at Trinity College Dublin where he graduated with a BA in Classics. He also holds an honours Bachelor of Divinity and a Master of Theology degrees from Queen's University, Belfast. His theological training for the Methodist Church in Ireland was at Edgehill Theological College, Belfast.

The President served as a Circuit minister for two separate periods, one in Bray Co. Wicklow, the other as Superintendent Minister of the Belfast Central Mission. It was from this appointment that he was elected as Secretary of Conference and General Secretary of the Methodist Church in Ireland at the Conference of 2007.

The larger part of Donald Ker's ministry has been in the field of academia. He has been the Methodist Chaplain to the Universities and Colleges of Dublin as well as Queen's University Belfast. In 1991 he was appointed Senior Tutor in Edgehill Theological College where his main teaching subject and research interest was in the area of New Testament. For a period he served as Director of Studies in the Institute of Theology in Queen's University Belfast. He has also held membership of many of the Methodist Church's senior Committees.

The Rev. Donald Ker is married to Sandra and they have four adult children all of whom are married. Among his leisure interests, he lists "Classic Cars at the budget end of the market!"

Mr. Ker is following in the Presidential foot-steps of both his grandfather and father who were also Presidents of the Methodist Church in Ireland, His grandfather in 1926 and his father 50 years ago in 1959.

The Service of Installation, at which the President of Ireland HE Mary McAleese was present, was held in St. Paul's Parish Church, Glenageary, Co. Dublin on Thursday 4th June 2009.

[Faith, Hope, Love - Presidential Address](#) by the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, **Rev Donald P Ker** - Thursday 4th June 2009 in St Paul's Parish Church, Glenageary  
[Conference 2009 Report](#)

The **Bible Studies** were led by **Glenn Jordan, Director of the Skainos Project, East Belfast**

**Mission:** [Things to do at the end of the World I - Lament, Things to do at the end of the World II - Buy Land](#)

["A Theology of Place - One Place for All Places"](#) - Discussion paper also by **Mr Glenn Jordan**, Director of the [Skainos Project](#), the Urban Redevelopment Programme associated with the [East Belfast Mission](#). This paper may be useful if you are thinking about some of the practical implications of planning new church premises as well as the use and place of current premises within local communities.



## Conference Report Methodist Church in Ireland 2009

The Annual Conference was held in Blackrock on the Dublin District from Thursday 4 th June until Sunday 7 th June. The Rev Donald Ker was elected as President of the Methodist Church in Ireland. At the Installation Service in St Paul's Parish Church in Glenageary, Conference was honoured by the presence of the President of the Republic of Ireland, Her Excellency Mrs Mary McAleese, and her husband.

Conference decided that the Irish President should in future preside over the Irish Conference. Until this year the British President had fulfilled that role in a tradition that dates back to John Wesley. Members of the British Delegation were happy with this decision and there will continue to be a warm spirit of co-operation between the two Churches.

Conference appointed for the first time, a Lay Leader, Mrs Gillian Kingston from County Tipperary who will take up office in 2010. The Lay Leader is elected for three years.

The President Designate is the Rev Paul Kingston (C), who is stationed in County Limerick.

The Board of Education reported on the failure to reach agreement on the issue of Post Primary Transfer in the North. Many Grammar Schools are now setting their own admissions test adding to the pressure, confusion and uncertainty of parents, children and schools. Concern was also expressed that the wider issue of poverty of aspiration and under-achievement among sections of the Protestant Community and particularly boys is not being addressed. The Southern Executive was greatly concerned about the cut-backs in funding as a result of recession.

Conference adopted a [Dignity in the Church Policy](#) to protect anyone, ministerial or lay, who might be the victim of bullying or harassment while engaged in the work of the Church.

The Home Mission Forum brought forward proposals, as requested by Conference 2008, to remove the District layer and replace it by approximately 20 Circuits. Key to this is a need for a transformation in attitudes to embrace the concept of [Team Ministry](#) with members, both Lay and Ordained, using their gifts to help prepare the Church to participate in God's Mission. Following a lengthy debate, the Home Mission Forum were directed to set up pilots which Conference could consider.

On several occasions Conference expressed social concerns. It deplored the indiscriminate use of rockets by Hamas against civilian targets in Israel and the massively disproportionate retaliation by Israel in Gaza; it expressed dismay that Israeli forces had uprooted and appropriated many of the olive trees which were given to Palestinian farmers following the Olive Tree appeal last Christmas; it expressed concern that the Irish Government, which has a good record in providing overseas aid, had severely cut back on its commitments due to the economic downturn: the poorest are the most vulnerable in hard times.

The climax of the Conference was the Ordination Service on Sunday evening when two young men, Rev Nick McKnight and Rev David Turtle, were ordained to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament: Rev Nick McKnight.

# **Sermon preached by the newly installed President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, Rev Donald P Ker**

**Thursday 4th June 2009 in St Paul's Parish Church, Glenageary**

## **Faith, Hope and Love**

‘Now we see but a poor reflection in a mirror - now I know only in part’. Paul's honest cry from the heart in 1 Corinthians 13 has a very contemporary ring to it. Written first to a struggling Church undergoing the tensions of change in a larger world that was occasionally hostile to it, but largely ignored it, Paul's words might well find echoes among us tonight. The Ireland of 2009 is very different from the Ireland of, say, 1959. The Christian Church, not least the Methodist Church in Ireland, is different from the Church of 1959, and sometimes we can be excited, or anxious, energized or demoralized, or quite frankly just confused by all the change.

But the key point that Paul wants to make, and the key point that we want to hear tonight, is that in the midst of this there are three marks that remain, three marks that are to be found, whatever the spirit of the age, whatever the circumstance of the church, whatever the issues she is grappling with, whatever the opportunities she is offered. They are Faith, Hope, Love. Let's think about how we might apply them.

## **Faith**

We are called, together, to be people of Faith. We pledge ourselves to live humbly before the mystery of the living God.

We can't for one moment pretend that this will be easy. It's a number of years since Alistair Campbell issued the comment ‘We don't do God’ – but that phrase, notorious though it now is, nevertheless sums up a spirit which can be found in some places of this island at this time. Some of the blame for that must lie at our own door in the churches – for we haven't always illustrated or even understood what it really means to belong to Jesus. Some of the cause is in the nature of Western Society which has long lived imagining that it is self-sufficient and so is challenged much more than it would care to admit by the thought of a God who is over all, through all and in all.

We live humbly before the mystery of the living God. I want to add my own voice of appreciation to so many others who are grateful for the 24/7 prayer movement which has touched us over the last number of years. Those who have worked to create prayer-rooms, those who have signed up for the long watches of the night, those who have slipped in for half an hour, all have sought to keep themselves open to God. They have also worked to help the rest of us appreciate that there are all sorts of ways to be open to God. Let's keep looking for new ways.

But beware. David Ford offers us an important warning when he writes ‘Religion is extraordinarily resourceful at disconnecting its rituals and practices from the living God.’ The warning applies whether you see yourself as steeped in the tradition of Methodism, or seeking to re-shape some traditions, or belonging within another part of the Church of Jesus

Christ altogether. In the end let our focus in our congregations and Church Councils not simply be about style – what we sing, how we pray, what we do with the furniture in our buildings. Let the focus be with our minds, our hearts, our desire before anything else to be God's people.

And let it be joyful. The call is to the living God, the God who created us and all humanity to 'glorify God and enjoy him for ever.'

## Hope

We are called, together, to be people of Hope. We pledge ourselves to be involved in the world around us as Resurrection people.

At the heart of the huge battles that Paul had with the Corinthian church (and he had a number) lies his absolute conviction that Jesus is risen and alive, and because of this nothing in the here and now, never mind the hereafter, can be the same. Jesus risen means the Creator God is at work in his new creation, and we're involved.

You may recall that, in ch 15 of 1 Corinthians, Paul warms to the theme of Resurrection – to underline his belief he uses his own experience, arguments from logic, from nature, from liturgical practice, and a bit of apocalyptic thrown in for good measure, and then, after a glorious hymn which ends 'thanks be to God who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord' he sums it up – 'Therefore, my brothers and sisters, stand firm... always give yourselves to the work of the Lord because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.' When, in the life of our personal discipleship or our life together in the Church, we're tempted to get weary, we need to hear these words. Hope means that we stand firm.

Hope, resurrection hope, also allows us to dream. Lynda Neilands has, in the last few months, brought to us the story of Nigel Williams, whose faithful Christian discipleship eventually brought him to the role of being the first Children's Commissioner for Northern Ireland, prior to his untimely death. Maybe it tells you something about where I am in life, but for me one of the most moving parts of an inspiring story came with Nigel's poems. He reflects on the promise that, with God's Spirit, old men will dream dreams – dreams which may reflect a desire for happiness, which is good, but dreams about some far more important than happiness – dreams about hope.

### Old Men's Dreams

*Dreaming is ageless  
Performance doesn't falter as the body creaks.  
Old men's dreams aren't wiser or more constrained  
But age may stunt the dreamer's hope  
Of seeing his fantasy realised.*

*Edwards dreamed of a golden set.  
Older than most the sand was slipping through,  
But he focused on the chance  
that Manchester brought and  
Hopped, skipped and jumped to fulfil the dream.*

*Our dreams may focus on increased leisure.  
Children growing up, fewer ties that bind  
We think of tandems, motor homes  
Theatre nights, travel to islands in the sun.  
But are these the dreams the prophet meant?*

*Yes, fantasies of fun and fulfillment  
Lives replete in joy, enriched by friends.  
But dreams also of wider impact  
For cities, nations, peoples left behind  
Dreams of justice, mercy, peace.*

*Our dreams can be realised.  
They need not linger in the sleepy bed.  
People can be changed,  
Lives healed by society's ills.  
If we but trust, his Kingdom will come.*

Dreaming, yes, but not just fanciful dreaming. This resurrection hope means that we're called to be witnesses to the life and ways of the living God in the community around us. Jim Wallis, of the Sojourners community, has said about these islands that as nations we are faced with a basic choice – in the light of all we face and all we observe we can either go the way of cynicism or the way of hope.

Hope means that we care about what happens in this island and beyond. That's why, in this Conference, we will express our deep concern about the future of education in this island, both North and South. That is why we will be thinking carefully about how we now help our community to face up to the legacy of our recent troubled past.

It is Christian hope that will inform our reflection on the economic life of our country, and Christian hope which is to be the driver behind any discussion we may have on re-shaping ourselves more effectively for mission.

## **Love**

We are called, together, to be people of love. We pledge ourselves to model Jesus.

This means that within the Church we love one-another – it's Jesus who says to us 'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one-another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another'. So let's be very clear about this, because it's at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian. The way we model Jesus, the way we help one-another to trust Jesus, to obey Jesus, to love Jesus, the way we help our young people and our not so young people to be excited by following Jesus, and to see that it works, is by loving each-other.

This doesn't mean that we can't differ from each-other, or that we seek at all costs to avoid conflict. It's natural, indeed it's probably essential, that we have different views. There were times when Jesus wasn't afraid to say plainly to his disciples things that they really didn't want to hear. But loving each-other in the life of the Church means that, as we keep working and living together, committed to each-other, we will be patient, be kind, we won't envy or

boast or be proud, rude or self-seeking – we won't be easily angered and we won't keep a record of wrongs.

But it also means that we love the people who don't belong within our fellowship – the way we model Jesus to people who know little if anything about him is to love them. It means that our Churches will be known as friendly places of welcome. It means even more that we will have a care and be on the lookout for how we can serve and pray for those who would not dream of coming near our churches.